



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Audio comments and photos of U.S. Attorney Todd Graves and other participants in today's press conference will be available to download from the district's Web site at www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow

NITRO UPDATE
**LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP COMBATS CRIME
IN NORTHWEST MISSOURI**

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, and Mark S. James, Special Agent in Charge of the Kansas City Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, today touted the success of an area law enforcement partnership. At a joint news conference this morning, representatives of law enforcement agencies in northwest Missouri marked the second anniversary of NITRO – the Northwest Missouri Interagency Team Response Operation.

NITRO, which includes a 16-county area of northwest Missouri, is staffed by full-time law enforcement officers from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Cameron Police Department, the Maryville Department of Public Safety, the Grundy County Sheriff's Department and the Worth County Sheriff's Department, as well as receiving support from the Missouri State Highway Patrol and the Andrew County Sheriff's Department. Additional law enforcement agencies participate on a case-by-case basis in their jurisdictions. NITRO also works closely with existing law enforcement task forces in Buchanan County, northeast Missouri and elsewhere.



“NITRO’s success over the past two years can be credited to a team of federal, state and local law enforcement officers who have worked together to make a significant impact,” said Graves. “It has been an overwhelmingly positive team from the first day.”

Participating in today’s press conference were Mark James, Special Agent in Charge of the Kansas City Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Capt. Ron Replogle, Division of Drug and Crime Control, Missouri State Highway Patrol; Chief Corey Sloan of the Cameron Police Department; Director Keith Wood of the Maryville Public Safety Department; Sheriff Gary Howard of Andrew County; Sheriff Greg Coon of Grundy County; Sheriff Neal Groom of Worth County and NITRO board member Roger Durant of Cameron.

NITRO targets violent offenders, convicted felons who illegally carry guns, and armed drug traffickers in a 16-county area of northwest Missouri. “NITRO has hit that target effectively,” Graves said. “In the past two years, 131 defendants have been referred for either federal or state prosecution with a total of 186 separate violations. Looking at the bigger picture, NITRO is one measure of my commitment to combat all categories of crime in northwest Missouri.”

For example, Graves said, the total number of federal criminal cases prosecuted from northwest Missouri in 2003 was three times higher than the previous year. Along with the NITRO cases, the U.S. Attorney’s Office tripled the number of indictments for everything from fraud to bank robbery. “And the statistics for 2004 to date are tracking for similar results,” Graves said.

In 2001, there was only one federal child porn case prosecuted from this area. But in just the first nine months of 2004, four defendants have been indicted on child porn charges, with more investigations still ongoing.

NITRO task force officers developed the first leads that ultimately led to the federal indictment of former Sullivan County Associate Circuit Court Judge Jeffrey Sayre, who is now serving a four-year sentence for soliciting a bribe while he was on the bench.

“And of course,” Graves added, “NITRO has boosted the number of narcotics and firearms cases.”



NITRO was launched in October 2002, at which point there had been few federal charges ever filed against felons in this area for illegally possessing firearms. In 2003, however, there were 24 defendants. "That's 24 ex-cons who had both a criminal record and an illegal gun, taken out of our communities and prevented from committing any more violent crimes," Graves said.

Federal drug cases are complicated, multi-jurisdiction, multi-defendant, multi-count cases. There was one federal drug trafficking case prosecuted in 2002; in NITRO's first year there were five.

"This track record of success is the direct result of the strategic partnerships forged by NITRO," Graves said. "By joining forces, we have accomplished more than our individual agencies could achieve alone."

NITRO delivers the resources of the federal government to grass roots law enforcement efforts. Heading up this initiative has been the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The Kansas City Field Division provides some of the manpower for NITRO, as well as vehicles and other equipment (including computers), and provides training to participating law enforcement officers.

In addition to the investigative officers assigned to NITRO, the U.S. Attorney's Office provides a full-time federal prosecutor who focuses on NITRO cases. "I am committed to putting the resources together to make this new coalition an effective tool for law enforcement in northwest Missouri," Graves said.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow

